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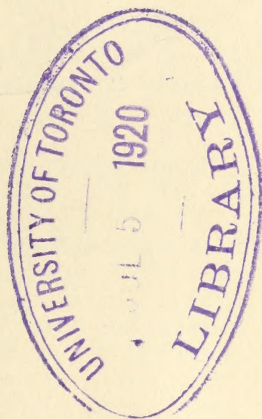
# The Spiritual


## The Chief Element in Americanism

Baccalaureate Address before the Graduating Classes of the  
University of Cincinnati of 1920, by

President Charles William Dabney

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# THE SPIRITUAL

## THE CHIEF ELEMENT IN AMERICANISM

AN ADDRESS BY

PRESIDENT CHARLES WILLIAM DABNEY

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"His Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and His Dominion is from generation to generation."—*Daniel IV. 3.*

"For as the body is one, and hath many members, all members of that one body, being one, are one body."—1 Cor. XII. 12. "There should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another."—XII. 25.

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It is a high privilege to speak to you men and women of the graduating classes of 1920; and it is also a serious responsibility. For the privilege, I thank you. The responsibility I shall try to meet by asking you to consider with me the one subject that seems most important in this time of unrest and confusion,—the safety of your country. What should educated young men and women be thinking of and preparing for in such a time as this, if not their duty to their country?

At such a time it is well, in the first place, for us to examine the foundations of our country and the principles of our Americanism. For ours is today a terribly shaken world. The foundations of the old world have all been heaved and broken up, and the very principles of our American government are being attacked by many.

The awful fact is that the war has torn away the restraints of religion and law and taught men to put their faith in force alone. The Czar and the Kaiser appealed to force to conquer the people, and when their governments were overthrown, the Bolsheviks and the Spartacans appealed to force to conquer their fellow citizens. Having overthrown the autocracies of the kings and emperors, we are now threatened by a worse tyranny, the autocracy of the proletariat. The ominous fact is that in nearly every European nation which was in the war, and in many of the neutral countries as well, there has come a great rift between the classes. Everywhere on the Continent, designing men are inciting the different orders to fly at each other's throats. And the worst expression of this evil spirit, the Bolshevik movement, is not satisfied to divide the nations into sections, as former proletariat movements tried to do, but seeks boldly to make a cleavage wholly through the entire human race, arraying one group against all the others and establishing a minority of manual workers as tyrants over all the world. This vicious scheme, men with devilish cunning, are trying by insidious propaganda to introduce into all the unhappy countries of Central Europe and even into France, England, and America.

We went to war to overthrow all the autocracies of every kind and to make the world democratic throughout. We hoped that the war would



banish all classes from the governments of Europe and establish the masses in control there, as they are in America. Now what is the result? We hope that in France and England the democratic movement has been strengthened. The socialists were well beaten in the last election in France, and the labor men and the lords sit side by side in Great Britain. These are the most hopeful things that have come out of the war. It would almost be worth what it cost in blood and agony, if out of the war came for all the peoples the rule of the masses instead of the rule of the classes. We looked for the new era in which one great family of nations would supplant the old "balance of powers," lording it over the weak peoples and the dependent nations. Class rule within the nations and this class rule between the nations—both are tyranny. Through the establishment of democracy among the peoples and of a new international order, made permanent in a League of Nations, we hoped to make men free everywhere and peace regnant throughout the world.

But, alas and alas! What a slump in our moral aims! When we met here two years ago, how high were our aims? How different our feelings now! What a disillusionment to our dreams! Where we felt enthusiasm for high ends then, we now feel disappointment and depression. France is thinking only of how to defend herself from Germany; England of how to secure more colonies and advance her trade; and as for the United States, we would forget the war except for the high prices of everything and the demand of the American Legion for pay for fighting it.

We have not ratified the League of Nations, and a new class tyranny threatens to destroy all the gains of the war for democracy. In Russia the rule of one class was overthrown only to establish the tyranny of another class. Bolshevism is more terrible than Czarism. In Hungary, a people just freed from the tyranny of an oligarchy, terrorized by the fear of this new tyranny, beg for a king again. In Italy is great discontent and uncertainty. Democratic government totters in Germany and fails entirely in Austria. There is grave danger that we may lose all the gains of the war; that through the wicked partisanship of both sides at Washington, we may fail to win for a suffering world the liberty and opportunity for which eight million men gave their lives!

Thank God that, so far, in America, we have been free from the domination of any class. In spite of all that the radicals say, we have in this country a government of all the people in the realest sense yet known in this world. No class rules in our land yet, and you must see to it that none ever does. That is the next great struggle ahead of you. The Americanism your fathers fought for must be preserved in this land and handed down to your children.

Yet there are some symptoms of disease in the body of our Republic. The past few years have witnessed some changes in our laws and customs which give us deep concern. When the war, for example, made it necessary for the government to take over the railroads and telegraphs, immediately we saw a class of workers seize the opportunity to hold up the government. In view of the great emergency, suppressions of many of our rights were willingly submitted to during the war, by all good citizens;

but the danger now is that these encroachments upon private rights may be made permanent and lead us into government ownership and socialism. We want no more national ownership than is necessary to perform the simplest functions of democratic government. Private ownership is the condition of progress in all industry. Public ownership means death to ambition, the destruction of initiative and the paralysis of all the natural energy of men.

Nor can we fail to note that some strangers among us are trying to develop group government in America. Aliens and radicals, mostly from Russia and Germany, are striving to promote a class revolution, and academic cranks and "parlor Bolsheviks" are giving them aid and comfort. More ominous still, among all our people there is a spirit of irresponsibility and indifference, a disposition to loaf and malingering. Production halts, while expenditure races. Though receiving double the wage in dollars, factory workers deliberately do from twenty-five to forty percent less work. An ugly spirit of discontent is abroad in the land that has no justification in the wages or the social conditions. And everywhere we see wild extravagance among people who can least afford to waste.

Meanwhile the communist party of America is organized and at work. Our Department of Justice has exposed its plat forms. Read them and note how they put the whole emphasis upon *class*, CLASS—that impossible thing in America. "Only the 'workers' are to rule," they say. "The bourgeoisie, 'the masses,' are to be overthrown." Hear their platform:

"The Communist Party of America is the party of the working class. The communist of America proposes to end capitalism and organize a workers' industrial republic. The workers must control industry and dispose of its products. The Communist Party, realizing the limitations of all existing workers' organizations, proposes to develop the revolutionary movement necessary to free the workers from the oppression of capitalism. The Communist Party insists that the problems of the American worker are identical with the problems of the workers of the world.

"The Communist Party is the conscious expression of the class struggle of the workers against capitalism. Its aim is to direct this struggle to the conquest of political power, the overthrow of capitalism and the destruction of the bourgeois state.

"The Communist Party prepares itself for the revolution in the measure that develops a program of immediate action, expressing the mass struggles of the proletariat. These struggles must be inspired with revolutionary spirit and purposes."

These people, you see, claim the right to rule because of their occupations. There is thus no essential difference between the utterances of this class and those of the Junker class of Germany, who claimed the right to rule because of their ownership of land. In each case, it is a class against



the mass of the people. Now, no true American approves of any such "class consciousness" as this. For Americanism means equal opportunity for all everywhere and equal rights for all in every part of the government. This is the Americanism which you must maintain, for which you must fight if need be.

Such is the present state of the Republic. We are threatened with an insidious disease. How shall we prevent it? Where is the seat and whence the source of this disease? Where have we failed in our national sanitation that we have permitted it to get into the body politic?

I affirm in the first place that it is a disease of the minds and spirits of our fellow-citizens. That a great change has taken place in the point of view of our people and in their feeling towards their government, is plain. But how has this lowering of their ideals, this demoralization of their feelings come about? Have we failed in educating and training them? Is it not a fact that we have neglected the proper education of our citizens? We talk a great deal of late of the education of immigrants in Americanism. Should we not first educate ourselves? Had we not better begin by Americanizing Americans? How shall we make old-fashioned, true Americans out of our people? What is our duty as citizens, as teachers in relation to this problem?

We commonly define democracy as that system of government which aims to provide equality of opportunity for each man to make of himself all that his God-given powers will permit, and to this end to enjoy all the rights and privileges under law of any other man in the republic. So far, so good. But I take it that our Americanism is something more than equality of opportunity before the law. Americanism stands for our whole American philosophy of life and society, our scheme of education, training, working, and living in the broadest sense, as well as for our plan of government. America stands for something more than the right to make a living,—it stands for the *right to live*, in the noblest way we can. For men do not "live by bread alone." Democracy connotes a spiritual as well as a material element. Equality of opportunity in government, in church, in school, in work, and in trade are indeed important; but equality limited to these things will never satisfy men fully. There must be a spiritual union to bind men together in the true democracy. What is the spiritual element in our democracy?

Our theory of democracy assumes that human society differs from a collection of individuals and their relations. Society is not simply the sum total of all the people together with the sum total of their mutual relations; society is a living organism, like our bodies. To say that man is a mere collection of cells, together with the sum of their relations and functions, may be a satisfactory description of the body after life has left it and it has fallen into decay. The living organism of human society has a life of its own, however, far surpassing the innumerable lives of the cells which the histologist sees or of the organs whose functions the physiologist studies as they operate in our individual bodies. The intelligent, socially-minded citizen perceives that he is a member of a living, growing organism of marvelous structure, from which he was lately born, and in the service

of which he must find his immortality. This, for him, is humanity; this is society.

This society has first of all a physical basis. This organism we call America has for its home a beautiful world of hills and plains, rivers and roads, houses and gardens, fields and cities, churches and graves, monuments and memorials, existing here long before any of us were born, and destined to continue long after we are all dead. These things constitute the foundation and framework of humanity, these are the material factors of human society.

But society also has a spiritual basis. The traditions, histories, customs and laws of our country, its manner of thinking and ways of feeling, its romance and its poetry, its religion and its philosophy, are from generation to generation. Each man of us, besides being the son of this wonderful organism, is a part of this spiritual environment; but how partially and for how brief a time!

These things, then—the physical and spiritual factors, more than the ephemeral individuals—constitute society. Governments, social organizations and institutions, with their systems of mutual duties, fidelities, and affections; their standards of honor and respect; their prides of valor and of victory—all these elements and many more too refined and delicate to be disentangled—these all are the web and woof of this wonderful fabric we call human society.

To this higher and continuing life, moreover, man belongs more completely and intimately than he does to mother and father, to wife and children. He is like an oak, born of millions of trees in ages past, with its thousands of roots in the soil, and its myriads of leaves in the sunshine. It produces in its time thousands of acorns, containing the germs of countless trees to come. And this man is not only the son of all the past; he is also the father of all the future. Human society is thus a part of the great universe of Nature herself, and not an affair of arrangement. It is a living, and not a mechanical thing; the work of creation, and not of man.

Take, for illustration, our own society, here in this America of ours. Think of the patient patriotism, the valor and virtue, the labor and love of all the innumerable millions which have gone to the making of America. What human mind was the designer or architect of this republic? What power planned the achievements of the Pilgrims, the pioneers, the soldiers, the statesmen—the builders of this great state? What power supported Washington at Valley Forge and gave him the deciding day at Monmouth? Who directed the thoughts of Madison, Monroe, and Hamilton when they made a new constitution containing principles never dreamed of by men before? What power taught the legislators, judges, physicians, soldiers, and teachers, who have guided and protected the American people down to this day? It is plain that all good things of this order come from above. Like all natural things, but far more than any other creation, human society is the reflection of the Divine plan. Only the mirror is polished by unskillful man, and as he improves it, the reflection of the stars becomes more and more true to the heavenly pattern.

From Marshal Foch, the victorious commander of the Allied Armies,



we have this wonderful testimony to this in the only statement he has made about the war:

"I do not call it a miracle when at a historical crisis a man is granted a clear vision and discovers later that this vision has determined actions of enormous consequence in a frightful war. But I do believe in this clear vision. I think that I received it at the Marne, at the Yser, and on the 26th of March. I believe it comes from a providential source in the hands of which we are but instruments, and that the decision of victory is determined from on High, by a Will Superior and Divine."

The divine origin of these things, now too often forgotten among us, was, in ancient days, recognized by all people; and human society has everywhere, in all times, flourished best where its divine origin has been most clearly understood. Which, for example, did more for humanity, the Hebrew theory that society was made by God, or the Roman system of man-made laws? Which has done more for our modern society, the Reformation, which taught men that, as sons of God, they should be free in spirit as well as in body, or the French Revolution, which taught them that, as soulless animals, they should consider only their political and economic interests?

The unity and continuity of society is the teaching of all the philosophers from Plato to Darwin. According to Plato, every individual thing is transitory, living out its brief cycle of existence, fulfilling its part, and then giving place to its successor. Browning's *Paracelsus* says, "Man is not man yet, but by the power of love shall develop into something ever nobler." Tennyson wrote:

"Follow you the star that lights a desert pathway, yours  
or mine,  
Forward, till you see the highest Human Nature is divine."

This doctrine of the unity and continuity of life and its progressive development was taught also by all the prophets and poets from Job to our time. God said to Job, "Whats ever is under the whole heaven is mine." In Daniel, "His kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and his Dominion is from generation to generation." And Jesus, "So the Kingdom of God is as if a man cast seed into the ground and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow and he knew not how, for the earth brought forth fruit of herself, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." Taking up the inspiring theme, St. Paul says, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, all the members of that one body, being one, are one body." Therefore, "there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another."

The materialistic theory sinks us in pessimism; this theory of a God-made society fills us with hope. For such a society, divinely made, with



a life of its own, rooted in the eternal past, is capable always of renewal and fruitfulness, while a man-made society must be ever made over again at fearful risk of ruin, as we witness in Russia today.

From this doctrine of the nature of society and of the law of its growth, we see that if we would accomplish anything for humanity, we must work in accordance with the eternal laws of nature and of God, else our effort is not merely failure, but harm. All efforts to advance society which do not recognize His eternal laws are ruinous. The materialistic efforts of the Kaiser and now of the Bolsheviki, are ever doomed to cause destruction because they do not obey His law to love all your neighbors.

On the other hand, every submission to the law of love, every respect for it, every suffering and every sacrifice for it, is working together with God in producing the perfect society, the Kingdom of God on earth.

Everybody agrees that, if we only observed the two great precepts which command that we love God and love our neighbor, all social disorders would soon be at an end. The world is alive already with just this heavenly charity, and its fruit can be seen on all hands. In the fields of educational, social, and religious work, the true method of social restoration for which we are pleading is actually being carried out upon a prodigious scale and with great effect. Where homes already flourish in which industry, patience, contentment, and love go hand in hand; in which thrifty management, domestic skill, and sincere hospitality make social life wholesome; in which healthy children are born and trained to usefulness—in such homes we know at once that the law of love rules. Where communities already exist in which each man has honest work and proper pay, where colleges are training young men and women like these here, where the schools are teaching the children how to live as well as to learn, where the churches forget their creeds sufficiently to work together—where such families, such communities, such schools, and such churches exist, there we perceive that the law of love for one's neighbor is enforced. There the work of re-creating society is going on.

On the other hand, these beautiful results are not produced either by legislatures or congresses, by soviets or parliaments. Nor are they produced by visiting lecturers, philanthropic committees, or social workers. These results are not produced by any scheme of distributing wealth or administering government. People who propose to correct all these social evils with legislation or machinery of any kind are beginning at the wrong end. The social problem cannot be solved by legislatures or congresses, parliaments or soviets, but the social problem is solved by homes and local communities, by schools and by churches. By legislation we may remove some of the opportunities for oppression and some of the temptations to crime—and we should do this by all means, wherever we can—but we should never forget that we cannot by legislation teach people to love their neighbors. While legislative expedients are helpful, they are subject to endless change, and the hope that the external conditions of social welfare will ever, at any time or in any country, be perfected and fixed is illusory.

Neither will society be re-created by any economic revolution. Com-

munism will not produce a better economic life. Socialism will not do it. We see already that Bolshevism fails utterly to solve the economic problem. On the contrary, so far as a general security and richness of life have existed in any age, they have been the fruits, not of economic change, but of new social vitality, and this vitality is ever the product of good will. Instead of good government and economic conditions producing social welfare and good will, it is the other way around; it is good will which produces good government and better economic conditions.

If economic revolutions and legislation will not save society, what, then, is the method of social redemption? The answer of history is reassuring. We have seen society actually renewed time and time again, and always under the influence of religion. We have seen society corrupted with the disease of Babylon and restored by the Hebrew prophets; we have seen it strangled to death under the tyranny of the first Rome and saved by Christianity; we have seen it smothered with ignorance and superstition by the second Rome and revived by the Reformation.

What, then, is the meaning of these miraculous renewals of life in society? As the sunlight revives the life in the trees and grass each spring, so love and good will make young again the mind and heart of man and nation. As the health of every creature depends on the completeness with which it fulfills the end of its being, so the renewal of society depends on the degree to which its members honor and obey God. Only thus can we escape from bondage into "the glorious liberty of the children of God."

Religion is the foundation of all human culture. In all high art there is a religious element. All great music contains a religious note. There is no noble literature without religion; there is no real poetry without religion; there is no true philosophy without religion.

The way then to renew our deteriorating literature is not to thresh over its dead straw, but to renew its social life. The way to renew our decadent art is not to make absurd experiments in Futurism, but to realize good will and so renew the vision of the people. The only way to relieve the destitution of the people, and to make them hopeful and give them children in their homes, is again the same old way; it is to give them life and life more abundantly.

It is the children who renew perpetually the ever ageing race. For social renewal we must have healthy children, and such children are born of love and thrive only in an atmosphere of good will. In them only is the promise of a regenerated people. Salvation, dear friends, is not far away; it is here already in our little ones. In their beautiful, wholesome spirit, is actually present already the life necessary for the nation. The life is there if we would train it. We ourselves need only to become as little children to be assured that the Kingdom of Heaven is here!

It was thus that the gospel of good-will renovated human life twenty centuries ago to the freshness of a June dawn. It was thus that it raised woman to a new dignity, re-created the family, restored labor to an honorable place, united its members in a brotherhood of love, and inspired the whole race with a youth felt to this day to the ends of the earth.

We hear it often said that it does not much matter what a man believes,



so long as he does what is right. Believe it not, young friends; it is a poisonous lie! It does matter very much indeed to human society what people believe. As the teachings that we are members of one another built up that ancient society, so these materialistic teachings have accelerated the undoing of society. Since men have been taught, generation after generation, that these noble principles were worthless, progressive retrogression has been rapidly going on. When, contrary to the most majestic teachings that were ever given to this world, men were told by Schopenhauer that submission to the bond of unity and the love that suffers all things were no longer necessary; when they were taught by Nietzsche that the actions and sufferings that do most to strengthen human brotherhood, such as the pain of bearing each other's burdens, had, after all, no significance in preserving society; when, in other words, men refused to recognize religion in their social relations, it was inevitable that dissolution should follow, as it has in Germany.

I do not deny that there are many persons honestly trying to serve and perhaps actually serving society, who recognize no religious motive. But, at best, such persons can only see the surface symptoms of social disease and are insensible or uninformed with regard to the graver causes behind them. Not recognizing the spiritual basis of society, they do not understand the causes of social disintegration, of the principles that bring it about, and of the superlative need of that devoted service which alone restores society. Not being religious, they are not and never can be really effective saviors of mankind. To think of social interest as apart from religion, to think of life as distinct from other work, to think of a life of social service as separate from other ways of life, shows not a genuine social sense, but a dangerous insensibility to the real claims of society. For all work, life, thought, affection, suffering, and sacrifice, are either social service or social dis-service. Living for our neighbor and for our country is the vocation, not of some here and there, but of all; it is not one special work among other tasks, but includes, unites, and absorbs the life of all. Remember, that He who said: "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death," also said: "Let us not love in word or in tongue but in deed and in truth."

The power to see these wider relations which bind us in one great organism is the power which distinguishes man from the brute. The power by which man rises to realize that this relation is universal is religion. Religion alone teaches us our relation to the human organism and its Maker. To realize the divine relation of all things, to see everything in God, to relate everything to Him, to know the universal life, to feel that whether we eat or drink, work or worship, labor in the shop or die on the battlefield, it is unto the Lord, to relate everything to the Great All, which includes all—this is the function of religion.

I have tried, young friends, to show you that the essential principle of our Americanism, the essential principle of all true democracy, is a spiritual one; that it is the recognition of society as one family of men the world over, a brotherhood of men created and directed by God the Father. We have found that philosophy and history, as well as revelation, approve

ohis principle, and that our country illustrates its practice better than any tther that ever existed. Is it not, then, our sacred duty, not merely as Americans, but as citizens of the world, to maintain and extend our spiritual Americanism. We believe it is and that it is the only way to save the world, not merely from the present confusion, but from final destruction.